

"it's all right," I said.

I turned off the lights and went up the stairway with her.

"it's pitiful," she said, "he adores you."

"he thinks I'm a genius," I said.

"are you?" she asked as we got to the bedroom.

"I will be if I can get rid of him."

we stood there getting undressed.

"have you brushed your teeth?" she asked.

"many times," I answered.

then I got into bed, fast.
I was better at getting into bed than anybody that I knew.

then she climbed in:

"is your friend downstairs going to be all right?"

"he'll make the night and he'll return," I told her.

some things you just sleep away
and I decided to do that
as we faced away
I slipped my feet to the backs
of her calves
while half a block down
the dogs of night
barked about nothing.

THE WAVERING LINE

I don't know where they come from ...
the vet's ward, probably ...
they're old, balding, macho but
sexless ...
the sex drive is no longer important,
they are at the track everyday
arguing over their choices,
laughing ...
sometimes in between races they'll
talk about sports: which is best,
the best baseball team, the best

hockey team, the best basketball or football team, the amateurs and professionals are discussed, and who's the best player at each position ...

they often become angry and shout at each other ...

they wear old clothing, greys and browns, they wear large shoes and they each have a wrist watch ... and while other men their age fight each other in the arena of existence they sit about and argue about whether the screen pass is any longer a valid offensive weapon in professional football. (I don't think that they are really interested, there's simply nothing else to do, and areas of space must not be left unattended.)

they bet, first standing in front of the window, talking, making last minute adjustments, then one of them bets for all of them.

all the races end, of course, and each evening they leave ...

a wavering line of them ...

some stumbling a bit as if

they were walking upon their

shoelaces ...

they look worn and done,

defeated ...

"shit ... this god damned place ... catch me here again ... you can belt-whip my bung until it sings Dixie!"

"yeah, shit, Marty ... you'll be here ..."

"naw. fuck this place!"

the next afternoon they are all back, somehow they've found a small supply of new money -- they will pool their brains and do it today.

all nonsense is over.

they are quite serious, checking their Racing Forms.

they bet several races and things go wrong, the conversation moves from horses to sports and the screaming begins:

"YEAH, YOU KNOW WHAT? I'LL BET YOU NEVER EVEN HEARD OF CRAZYLEGS HIRSCH!"

"I SAW HIM, MAN! I SAW HIM PLAY!"
"YEAH? WELL, I SAW JIM THORPE!"
"YEAH? YOU SAW JIM THORPE JUST LIKE YOU
GOT LAID LAST NIGHT!"
"YEAH, I NOTICE YOU CAN HARDLY SIT DOWN!"
"I'LL TEAR YOUR GOD DAMNED HEAD OFF!"

the combat never evolves and that's well
and good, for they are fine fellows, we
need them like we need the Sierra Madres
slinking through the smog, like we need
Willie Shoemaker legging it up on just
one more mount, we need to forget the
women that didn't work and the ways that
didn't work, all the bad bets ...
what counts is continuance, what counts
is not noticing that the whole west side
of America is going to keel underwater,
and there was never any sense in having
gardens and in sending people to
Radcliffe.

I like to watch those fellows, they are
like a Broadway musical, only it's not
GUYS AND DOLLS it's GUYS AND GUYS, they
are fine fellows, the wavering line of
them, the most beautiful women in the
world mean nothing to them
because they know that only certain things
work for certain people, and there's
just no use wondering how it got that
way.

I get the best Broadway musical
every day from the best seat in the
house and I am the critic and the
audience and sometimes I'm on stage
too.

I don't know where they come from
and I don't know where they go.

the vet's ward, probably.

DEAD DOG

Bartowski completes a 58-yard touchdown pass
to beat the Rams in the final minutes.
I hear it on the radio
it's Sunday and I'm on the way to the track
I should make the third race.
the Falcons hold on to win and that's good.
I switch off the radio.